



France

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, some religious groups remain concerned about legislation passed in 2001 and 2004, which provided for the dissolution of groups under certain circumstances and banned the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by public school employees and students. A 1905 law on the separation of religion and State prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. A law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students entered into force in September 2004. Despite significant efforts by the Government to combat anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic attacks and incidents persisted. The Government has a stated policy of monitoring potentially "dangerous" cult activity through the Inter-ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES).

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to freedom of religion. Anti-Semitic incidents at the end of 2004 and in the first half of 2005 declined from previous record levels, but continued to occur at a disturbing rate. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to criticize strongly anti-Semitic and racist violence, and the Government maintained increased security for Jewish institutions.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 211,209 square miles, and its population is approximately 62.4 million.

The Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to press reports, only 12 percent of the population attends religious services of any faith more than once per month. In a poll released in December 2004, 64.3 percent of the respondents indicated they were Catholic, even if they never attended religious services. Another 27 percent polled stated they had no religious affiliation, while 8.7 percent cited another religious affiliation. Of those who identified themselves as something other than Catholic, 49.4 percent were Muslim, 21.8 percent were Protestant, 7 percent were Jewish, and 21.8 percent responded with another, unspecified religion. A February 2004 poll indicated that 60 percent of those interviewed believed in God, and 12 percent attended religious services often. The vast majority of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, but according to one member of the Catholic hierarchy, only 8 percent of the population are practicing Catholics. Muslims constitute the second largest religious group. There are an estimated 5 to 6 million Muslims in the country (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of how many of these are practicing Muslims vary widely. Protestants make up 2 percent of the population, and the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represent 1 percent, and those of the Sikh faith less than 1 percent. According to various estimates, approximately 6 percent of the country's citizens are unaffiliated with any religion.

The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000. According to press reports, at least 60 percent are not highly observant, celebrating at most only the High Holy Days. The large majority of observant Jews are Orthodox. There are small Conservative and Reform congregations as well.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that 250,000 persons attend their services either regularly or periodically.

Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority is associated with the Greek or

Russian Orthodox Church.

Other religions present in the country include evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches is growing because of increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to the press, there are approximately 31,000 Mormons. The Church of Scientology has an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 members.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. A long history of conflict between religious groups and between the Church and the French Republic led the state to break its ties to the Catholic Church early in the last century and adopt a strong commitment to maintaining a totally secular public sector. The 1905 law on the separation of religion and State, the foundation of existing legislation on religious freedom, prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith. Of the country's 10 national holidays, 5 are Christian holy days.

Religious organizations are not required to register, but may if they wish to apply for tax-exempt status or to gain official recognition. The Government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: "associations cultuelles" (associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and "associations culturelles" (cultural associations, which are normally not exempt from taxes). Associations in these two categories are subject to certain management and financial disclosure requirements. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. A cultural association may engage in profit-making activity. Although a cultural association is not exempt from taxes, it may receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations, such as schools. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories; the Mormons, for example, run strictly religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school under their cultural association.

Under the 1905 statute, religious groups must apply with the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and to receive tax-exempt status. The prefecture reviews the submitted documentation regarding the association's purpose for existence. To qualify, the group's purpose must be solely the practice of some form of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school may disqualify a group from tax-exempt status.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and approximately 30 of 1,050 Muslim associations have tax-free status. Approximately 100 Catholic associations are tax-exempt; a representative of the Ministry of Interior reports that the number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate accurately. More than 50 associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-free status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive. However, the prefecture may decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity with the 1905 law, its status may be changed, and it may be required to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

The 2001 About-Picard Law tightened restrictions on associations and provided for the dissolution of groups, including religious groups, under certain conditions. These include: endangering the life or the physical or psychological well-being of a person; placing minors at mortal risk; violation of another person's freedom, dignity, or identity; the illegal practice of medicine or pharmacology; false advertising; and fraud or falsification.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these religious groups. Adherents of these four religious groups may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their religious organization in a system administered by the central government.

Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and State. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow the local governments to provide support for the building of religious edifices. The Government partially funded the establishment of the country's oldest Islamic house of worship, the Paris mosque, in 1926.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from visa requirements to enter the country must obtain a three-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. All missionaries who wish to remain in the country longer than

90 days must obtain visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must apply with the local prefecture for a *carte de sejour* (a document that allows a foreigner to remain in the country for a given period of time) and must provide the prefecture a letter from their sponsoring religious organization.

Public schools are secular. In March 2004, the Government passed legislation prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, the Jewish skullcap, and large crosses; the legislation took effect at the beginning of the school year in September 2004. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but religious facts are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may home-school children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions. The Government subsidizes private schools, including those that are affiliated with religious organizations.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. Denial of crimes against humanity is illegal. The Government has programs to combat racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and through encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups. Government leaders, along with representatives from the Jewish community, the Paris and Marseille Grand Mosques, the Protestant Federation, and the French Conference of Bishops have publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In 2003, a law was passed against crimes of a "racist, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic" nature; the law classifies racist motivations for violent acts as aggravating circumstances and mandates harsher punishment for these crimes. March 2004 legislation further increased punishment for "hate" crimes. The Government regularly applies these laws in prosecuting anti-Semitic crimes.

The Government consults with the major religious communities through various formal mechanisms. The Catholic community is represented by the Council of Bishops. In 2002, the Government and the Catholic Church initiated an institutional dialogue focusing on administrative and judicial matters, such as chaplaincy services.

The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, comprises 16 churches and 60 associations. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community. It also acts as an interlocutor with the Government.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes the Jewish "worship associations" from the entire country. It acts as a liaison with the Government, trains rabbis, and responds to other needs of the Jewish community. In 1943, Jewish members of the French Resistance formed the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF). The CRIF's mission is to fight anti-Semitism, preserve the memory of the Holocaust, affirm solidarity with Israel, and promote peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The national French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) and 25 affiliated regional councils serve as interlocutors for the Muslim community with local and national officials on such civil-religious issues as mosque construction and certification of halal butchers. In November 2004, then-Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of a Foundation for French Islam which will assist in the funding of mosques, provide a transparent vehicle for individual and foreign donations, and assist in the training of foreign imams in the French language, history, and civics.

The Inter-ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) is charged with observing and analyzing sect/cult movements that constitute a threat to public order or that violate French law, coordinating the appropriate responses to abuses by cults, informing the public about potential risks, and helping victims to receive aid.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In March 2004, on the recommendation of an inter-ministerial commission established by the president to study secularism, integration, and the place of religion in the country, the Government passed a law prohibiting the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols--including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, and large crosses--by employees and students in public schools. In June 2004, the European Commission on Human Rights ruled that the law did not violate the freedom of religion; the law was implemented in September 2004. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom. By school year's end in June 2005, the Ministry of Education reports that 44 Muslim girls and 3 Sikh boys had been expelled from public school for violating this law; all had reportedly enrolled in private schools, distance education courses, or schools abroad. One Muslim group, however, indicates that the law has adversely affected 806 Muslim girls, whether by causing them to seek alternative educational options or requiring them to remove their veil. Media reports estimate that of the 13 million schoolchildren, approximately 1,200 Muslim school-aged girls wear veils. The Sikh community reports that of the roughly 200 school-aged Sikh boys, 84 percent are affected by the legislation.

The Paris Court of Appeals rejected a telemarketing firm's appeal of a 2003 ruling in favor of a young woman who sought reinstatement, damages, and interest after she was fired by the telemarketing firm for refusing to wear her headscarf in a manner deemed appropriate by her employer. A Lyon administrative appeals court rejected the case of a civil servant who filed a lawsuit after being disciplined in 2002 for wearing a Muslim headscarf at work, ruling that she had violated the principle of neutrality in the public service and disobeyed the orders of her superiors. Some Muslim and Sikh groups have protested the Government policy prohibiting the wearing of the head coverings in national identity photos. A case brought before the highest French court for administrative matters by a Sikh wishing to be permitted to wear his turban in driver's license and passport photos was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2004, Parliament passed a law permitting the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against a specific person or group of persons." Abdelkader Bouziane, an imam, was deported from the country in October, accused of publicly justifying wife-beating in an article.

The Government continued to encourage public caution toward some minority religions that it considers "cults." Mass suicides in 1994 by members of the Order of the Solar Temple led to heightened public concern about "cult" behavior. In 1995, a parliamentary commission studying so-called cults issued a report that identified 173 groups as cults, including the Raelians, the Association of the Triumphant Vajra, the Order of the Solar Temple, Sukyo Mahikari, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Theological Institute of Nimes (an evangelical Christian Bible college), and the Church of Scientology. The Government has not banned any of the groups on the list; however, members of some of the groups listed have alleged instances of intolerance because of the ensuing publicity. In May 2005, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin issued a Circular indicating that the Parliamentary list should no longer be used to identify sects, and authorities should instead focus their efforts on those sects that represent the greatest threat, notably those "small, fluid" groups that are "less easily identifiable" and which use the internet for recruitment. Some religious groups have hailed the move as a step forward, but call for Ministry of Justice Circulars emphasizing repressive measures against minority religions to be rescinded.

In January 2005, MIVILUDES published a guide for public servants instructing them how to spot and combat "dangerous" sects. There are several instances where French law regarding the right of patients to refuse medical treatment is noted, as well as subsequent court decisions. The Jehovah's Witnesses are mentioned as an organization that refuses blood transfusions, and there is mention of Health Ministry guidance to encourage treatment while respecting patient wishes. Some groups expressed concern that this guide would be misused by overzealous public servants against legitimate religious organizations.

Some observers remained concerned about the 2001 About-Picard law which permits the dissolution of religious groups, if it is established that group practices are believed to violate basic rights. In 2002, the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it. The law remained in force. Although the provisions allowing for the dissolution of groups have never been applied, another aspect of the law was utilized for the first time against the leader of a cult. Arnaud Mussy, the founder and spiritual head of the group Neo-Phare, was convicted in November 2004 of fraudulent abuse of the state of ignorance and the weakness of four followers. Mussy claimed to be the reincarnation of Christ and made several predictions in 2000 regarding the pending apocalypse; one of his adherents killed himself and two other followers attempted suicide allegedly because of the state of mind brought on by Mussy's manipulation. He has appealed the decision.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination, frivolous lawsuits, and prosecution for allegedly fraudulent activity. In 2003, the Court of Appeals of Paris fined the Paris-region Spiritual Association of the Church of Scientology approximately \$6,100 (5,000 euros) for breaking a law on information privacy; the decision was appealed. Church of Scientology representatives report that a case filed by a parent whose child attended an "Applied Scholastics"-based school remained ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. In March 2004, the police intelligence agency, Renseignements Generaux (RG), was instructed by the Administrative Tribunal of Paris to comply with a 2003 decision by the Council of State and provide the Church of Scientology with its files on the group, or be fined. The RG had refused to accede to the Church of Scientology's request since 2000, citing "public safety" concerns.

Some observers voiced concerns about the tax authorities' scrutiny of the financial records of some religious groups. In October 2004, the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses lost their appeal to the Court of Cassation on a 2002 ruling that they must pay \$62.3 million (45.7 million euros) in back taxes. The members claimed that they were discriminatorily and punitively audited because of their classification as a cult, and that authorities adopted a new administrative regulation to retroactively tax "manual donations" offered by adherents. The association further alleged that this tax had not been applied to any other not-for-profit or religious organization, and the amount of the tax exceeds the assets of the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. The case has been submitted to the European Court of Human Rights and was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In late 2003, the Ministry of Education created a national commission to combat anti-Semitism in schools and the Government continued efforts to promote tolerance and combat racism and anti-Semitism throughout the reporting period. In August 2004, the Mayor of Paris sent letters to all Paris-area principals calling for "debates on anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination" when classes resumed in September.

Additionally, the Government has taken other proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each department and creating a department-level Council of Religions to raise public awareness of increased racial and sectarian assaults and other incidents.

The number of reported racist and anti-Semitic incidents rose to a new high during 2004, particularly during the first half of the year, which is covered by last year's report. The number of such incidents in the period covered by this report has decreased sharply. According to the Ministry of Interior, there were 290 anti-Semitic acts in the first six months of 2005, down 48 percent from the 561 incidents recorded during the same period in 2004. Violent acts dropped even more dramatically, with 49 occurring in the first half of 2005 as opposed to 148 in 2004. The Government attributed the decreases to the culmination of efforts initiated since 2002, including a beneficial dialogue with the Jewish community and the determination of the State's internal security forces.

In June 2005, Rabbi Michel Serfaty, co-president of the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association (AJMF), launched a tour of Jewish and Muslim leaders throughout the country during the same time as the famous Tour de France cycling race to promote dialogue between the two communities. The organizers reported overall positive responses to the initiative.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a number of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the period covered by this report. The Council of Christian Churches in France is composed of three Protestant, three Catholic, and three Orthodox Christian representatives. It serves as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish communities, which discusses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

In June 2004, the Government commissioned Jean-Christophe Rufin, a doctor, writer, and president of the humanitarian association Action against Hunger, to prepare an in-depth report on racism and anti-Semitism in the country. The Rufin report, released in October, concluded that racism and anti-Semitism were a threat to French democracy and that anti-Semitic acts are not only carried out by elements of the extreme right and youth of North African descent, but also by "disaffected individuals" whose anti-Semitic obsessions prompt their attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions. The Rufin report also warned against radical anti-Zionists who question Israel's right to exist. The report recommended that a law be created to punish those publicly equating Israel with apartheid or Nazi Germany. Additionally, the report concludes that the press law of 1881, designed to guarantee freedom of the press, is too unwieldy to adequately address the issues of racism and anti-Semitism. It recommends removing from the press law all injunctions against incitement to racism and anti-Semitism and putting them into a new law written to specifically address these issues. The Rufin report also called for countering intolerance in primary schools and educating new immigrants about the fight against racism and anti-Semitism. Finally, the report advised following the recommendation of the Movement against Racism and for Community Friendship (MRAP) to create an observation system to monitor racist and anti-Semitic websites and work closely with authorities to prosecute offenders.

In a March 2005 annual report to the Prime Minister, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (NCCHR) indicated that there were 1,565 racist and anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, nearly double the 833 recorded

in 2003. The number of anti-Semitic incidents--including physical assaults, attacks against property, cemetery desecrations, threats, and reported insults--increased from 601 in 2003 to 970 in 2004. Disturbingly, the number of incidents occurring in schools nearly tripled. There have been no reported deaths due to anti-Semitic violence since 1995, but 36 persons were injured in anti-Semitic attacks in 2004.

Based on investigations of the incidents, the NCCHR concluded that people from an "Arab-Muslim background" committed the majority of anti-Semitic acts and represented 104 of the 209 individuals questioned. The large increase in anti-Semitic incidents since 2000 has been attributed to the beginning of the Second Intifada, the war in Iraq, and other events in the Middle East; however, the report remarks that 2004's increase does not correlate to current events and warns that "anti-Semitism is becoming established in a continuous and lasting manner."

The report noted that the number of incidents decreased dramatically in the fourth quarter of 2004 and expressed hope that the trend would continue into 2005. The Ministry of Interior reports that in 2004, there were 182 individuals arrested for anti-Semitic incidents. The Ministry of Justice, which uses different criteria in its collection of data, registered 387 anti-Semitic acts in 2004. The Justice Ministry reported in the NCCHR report that 95percent of incidents prosecuted resulted in some form of punishment.

The Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in the country (CRIF) operated a hotline to register allegations of threats in the greater Paris region. Additionally, the CRIF contributed an analysis of anti-Semitic acts and threats in the NCCHR's 2004 annual report. Based on its own information and that of the Jewish Community Protection Service (CSPCJ), the CRIF registered 95 anti-Semitic incidents during the first six months of 2005, as opposed to 590 for the entire year in 2004, 516 in 2002, and 503 in 2003. The CRIF stated in the NCCHR report that its figures do not always correspond to those of the Government, as victims do not always report their attacks to both the police and the CRIF.

In April 2005, CRIF condemned the sale of anti-Semitic cassettes by the Committee for the Well-being and Rescue for Palestinians (CBSP) at the annual meeting of the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF). The president of the UOIF called the situation "regrettable" and lamented that the situation had not been brought to his attention earlier, so as to prevent the dissemination. He stated, "We cannot tolerate the sale of such cassettes, this is an incitation to racial hatred, an incitation against religions. This is unacceptable."

In November 2004, a group of students visiting Auschwitz were accused of inappropriate behavior, including running, throwing snowballs, smiling next to pictures of deportees, and in the case of one student, making comments that approved of the Nazis actions. In January 2005, an appeals court rejected the appeals of two of the disciplined students, upholding the permanent expulsion for the student who made the remarks and confirming a 15-day suspension for another student.

In October 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called comments by Radio France International editor Alain Menargues "unacceptable." Menargues called Israel a "racist" state while publicizing his book on the West Bank security barrier. Menargues resigned as a result of his comments.

In October 2004, Bruno Gollnisch, a part-time university professor in Lyon, Member of the European Parliament, and vice-president of the extreme-right National Front, made several comments regarding the Holocaust to the media, questioning the use of gas chambers and stating, "I'm not contesting the existence of concentration camps, but as for the number of dead, historians might want to debate on it." In March 2005, he was banned from teaching at his university for five years; he has appealed the decision. In September, he will appear in court on charges of contesting crimes against humanity; however, he currently maintains immunity due to his position as a member of the European Parliament.

Jewish organizations and the Government criticized al-Manar, a Lebanese Hezbollah satellite channel, for consistently airing anti-Semitic programming, including an anti-Semitic television series during Ramadan in 2003. In July 2004, the Government amended the telecommunication laws, giving new regulatory powers over satellite broadcasts to the Audio Visual Superior Council (CSA). The CSA signed a one-year, limited license with al-Manar in November that included provisions banning expression of anti-Semitic sentiments, favorable coverage of suicide bombers and other terrorists, and incitement to racial and religious hatred. Shortly thereafter, the CSA petitioned the State Council, the country's highest administrative court, to ban the station based on the broadcaster's failure to curb anti-Semitic programming despite the restricted license agreement. In December 2004, the State Council banned altogether the transmission of al-Manar in the country. Prime Minister Raffarin called al-Manar's anti-Semitic programming "incompatible with French values" and urged the issue of satellite broadcasts be taken up at the European Union level. The country has also banned Sahar 1, an Iranian satellite station that broadcast similarly anti-Semitic and anti-Israel programming.

In 2003, after an arson attack destroyed a Jewish school in Gagny, President Chirac stated "an attack on a Jew is an attack on France" and ordered the formation of an inter-ministerial committee charged with leading an effort to

combat anti-Semitism. Since its first meeting in 2003, the committee has worked to improve government coordination in the fight against anti-Semitism, including the timely publication of statistics and reinforced efforts to prosecute attackers.

Authorities condemned anti-Semitic attacks, maintained heightened security at Jewish institutions, investigated the attacks, made arrests, and pursued prosecutions. The Government maintained increased security for Jewish institutions. More than 13 mobile units, totaling more than 1,200 police officers, have been assigned to those locales having the largest Jewish communities. Fixed or mobile police are present in the schools, particularly during the hours when children are entering or leaving school buildings. All of these measures were coordinated closely with leaders of the Jewish communities in the country, notably the CRIF.

The Government took other steps to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, particularly among young people; however, some groups asserted that the judicial system was lax in its sentencing of anti-Semitic offenders. During the period covered by this report, schools have emphasized the need for tolerance and copies of the film "Shoah" were distributed to all high schools for use in history and civics classes.

The Government has taken other proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each national department and announcing in June 2004 the creation of a department-level Council of Religions to raise public awareness of increased racial and anti-sectarian incidents. In September, the Mayor of Paris launched a campaign to fight all forms of intolerance that included 1,200 municipal billboards and bulletins in major newspapers.

International organizations have voiced support for the Government's efforts to combat anti-Semitism. In September 2004, representatives of the American Jewish Committee visited Paris to meet with government officials. They commended the country's tough approach to fighting anti-Semitism. The group's executive director stated, "I think France today realizes the seriousness of the struggle, and is mobilizing its government and its forces to fight against it." Following the publication of the Rufin report in October 2004, Israel's Ambassador to France called the report "exceptional." He continued, "France had the courage to accept the conclusions of the report and the change at the level of the intelligentsia, the authorities, and the media is remarkable." On January 23, 2005, the Global Forum against Anti-Semitism, a group under the auspices of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office and the Jewish Agency, released its annual report. Based on its methods of measurement, incidents in the country stayed relatively level and, in fact, declined in the second half of the year. According to the report, "Over the past year, French authorities have invested significant effort in fighting, and educating against, anti-Semitism." Members of the Arab/Muslim community experienced incidents of harassment and vandalism, particularly on the island of Corsica. In November 2004, assailants opened fire on an imam as he answered a knock at the door of the Muslim Cultural Association of Sartene, in southern Corsica. The imam was uninjured. In December 2004, there were two attacks against a building housing immigrants. The attacks have caused some families to move to the mainland or return to their countries of origin.

The attacks were blamed on elements of the island's nationalist movement, and many incidents involved graffiti with such slogans as "Arabs Out" and "Corsica for the Corsicans" written in the Corsican language. In November 2004, police placed 14 members of the nationalist group Clandestini Corsi under investigation. In December, Corsican authorities held a week of events aimed at increasing awareness of the danger of racism and promoting co-existence between immigrant and native Corsican populations.

According to the NCCHR, there were 595 racist acts recorded in 2004, up sharply from the 232 committed in 2003. The NCCHR study reported that, while responsible for 90 percent of acts between 1994 and 1999, far-right extremists were responsible for 14 percent of incidents in 2002 and 18 percent in 2003. However, 2004 marked a resurgence in extreme-right activity, which was cited as the motivating factor in 30 percent of the racist and anti-Semitic incidents. The NCCHR noted a shift, remarking that right-wing elements appeared to target individuals of Arab-Muslim background (292 acts) more often than those of Jewish origin (169 acts).

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Muslim headscarves may have led to incidents of discrimination against Muslim women. Members of the Muslim community alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they had been refused service by private businesses. Media reports indicated that some companies discourage women employees from wearing the headscarf or encourage them to wear a bandanna in its place.

In September 2004, a court handed down a 4-month suspended sentence and a \$13,624 (10,000 euros) fine to a woman who refused to sell property to an Arab couple.

Cemeteries and religious sites were often targets of attack; the Interior Ministry announced desecrations and destructive acts at 92 Christian, 31 Jewish, and 28 Muslim sites in 2004. Many of these incidents occurred in Alsace, where extreme-right groups have ties to similar groups across the border in Germany; some have linked the attacks against Jewish and Muslim sites to the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. In May 2005,

approximately 60 gravestones were smashed and a swastika drawn on a door of a Jewish cemetery in Sarreguemines (eastern France) shortly after the memorial service for the town's Holocaust victims had been held. Two young vandals, aged 14 and 12, were caught and confessed to having committed the act "out of foolishness."

On May 18, 2005, the Government approved a Ministry of Interior decision to disband the neo-Nazi group Elsass Korps.

In May 2005, a Versailles court of appeals found the authors and publisher of a 2002 article titled "Israel-Palestine: The Cancer" guilty of "racial defamation" for anti-Semitic content. Journalists Edgar Morin, Daniele Sallenave, and Sami Nair, as well as editor Jean-Marie Colombani have been ordered to pay the legal fees of the prosecuting groups and \$1.20 (1 euro) each in damages. The publishing newspaper, Le Monde, has been ordered to print a retraction. The decision has been controversial, particularly as one of the authors, Edgar Morin, is Jewish. A judge dismissed the initial complaint, ruling that any reasonable reader would not equate criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and his supporters as an attack on all Jews, but an appeals court found that three sentences in the article violated a 1990 antiracism law. Le Monde and the authors of the article have appealed the decision.

On June 13, 2005, a Paris court ordered French internet service providers to block the website of the French revisionist organization Association of Former Connoisseurs of War and Holocaust Stories (AAARGH) to French viewers. Two of three American ISPs have agreed to stop hosting AAARGH's website.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Representatives from the Embassy have met several times with government officials responsible for religious freedom issues. These issues have been raised regularly in meetings with other officials and Members of Parliament. The Embassy encourages interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. In October 2004, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar for Muslim community leaders to mark the end of the day's fast and recognize the significance of the month of Ramadan to Muslims. Embassy officers also meet regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved in the issue. The Embassy facilitates the visits of American Members of Congress and Congressional Commissions, as well as Congressional staff members and representatives from other Government agencies, to discuss religious freedom issues with religious leaders and senior government officials.

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